homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Monday, May 25, 1942

Subject: "PROTECT CHILDREN FROM FIRE AND BURNS." Information from engineers of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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One way every mother and every one else in a house where there are children can help the coming generation is to protect them from fire and burns at home. Children and old people suffer most from home fires, according to statistics. Hardly a day passes without a newspaper story of some child burned to death at home, critically scalded by hot fat, hot water or burned in some other way while playing in the kitchen. Children often reach up on the stove and pull over coffee pots or kettles of boiling food.

Most parents hope their homes are structurally safe from fire and take the precaution to carry fire insurance, which includes inspection for fire hazards. With our acute housing situation in hundreds of localities a house that burns down is more than a personal loss; it is a national calamity.

But fire-prevention engineers of the U.S. Department of Agriculture point out that it is not enough to make a home safe by proper construction and fire protection apparatus. The house must also be kept safe by training all the members of the family to observe ordinary precautions against fire and to develop habits that prevent accidental fires from starting. Once in a while a family fire drill might be held so that everyone, big or little, knows what to do and where to go if a fire occurs.

Certain kinds of fires occur over and over again where there are children. Take matches, for example, Children have to be taught not to play with matches - not even to touch them. Then, if you keep matches absolutely out of children's reach, and use only matches that strike on the box, you cut down on hazard of fire started

by matches.

A good many children have been burned when left alone at home without an adult. When children are alone they often experiment with matches or start fires in queer places- in closets, under beds and so on. Or their clothes may catch on fire from the stove or a lamp. The other children do not know what to do, or how to smother the flames with a rug or blanket, and before they can get help it is too late. Don't leave little children alone!

Another way very little children get burned is falling against a hot stove or heater or into an unprotected open fireplace. Open fires need strong screens in front of them, not only to keep children from stumbling in, but to keep sparks from jumping out.

Kerosene or gasoline lamps of course, are a fire hazard where there are children. Over and over again children of creeping age have been burned by pulling at a table cloth with a lamp standing on it.

No child should ever carry a lighted lamp anywhere in the house, That's a responsibility for an adult. Put out all lamps before leaving home or going to bed. Provide one or more flashlights always kept in the same place for entering dark rooms or seeing in closets or storerooms.

See that portable oil heaters are in good condition, and set them out of the path of people going through rooms, particularly children, who often do not notice where they are going. Set such heaters away from curtains and other inflammable furnishings and out of drafts.

In looking about your home for fire hazards as they might affect the children ask yourself some questions like these: Are clothes or dish towels hanging over or too near to a hot stove? Is the range too near the wood box, where it may set fire to the wood? Does the gas stove have faulty burners or flexible tubing? Do you ever leave an electric iron connected when you go to answer the door or the

telephone? The iron may overheat and set the board on fire, or a child may catch on the cord and pull the hot iron over on himself.

Do you have metal trash and ash containers in all rooms? If a child has the job of collecting and burning the household trash, do you have a safe trash burner for the job, and a safe place to use it?

If you use a radiant heater in the bath-room have you taught the children not to go near it, and not to touch the cord or socket when wet? Older girls sometimes use electric curling irons. The place to do so is in the bed-room, not the bath-room.

A war time job many children have taken on is collecting newspapers for the junkman. Have you provided a safe place to store these papers where they are not a fire danger? Have you taught the children to pile them in a neat compact way? If collected in the basement, such papers should not be piled near the furnace or near the wood, the coal bin or anything inflammable.

While thinking of your own basement, have you looked at the school basement? If it is a potential fire danger, form a committee to get something done about it. Some of the worst school fires have happened because nobody checked the condition of the school basement. In a number of states 4-H club members are doing fire hazard inspection, including the school on their assignments.

Finally, as a safety measure, arrange your furniture in the different rooms so as to leave a free, fast passageway to the nearest exit from that room and out of the house. Train everybody in the family to return the furniture to these positions after moving it. And don't forget to have an occasional family fire drill so every one knows what to do in case fire comes to your home from some source outside it.

(Written by E. H. Wharton.)

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